United Nations E/CN.6/2011/NGO/15

# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2010
English
Original: Spanish

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Fifty-fifth session**
22 February-4 March 2011
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

## Statement submitted by Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

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## Statement*

1. Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia ("Women for Freedom and Democracy") is an organization headquartered in Barcelona, Spain, that is active throughout Spanish territory and internationally, although the core of its activity is centred in Catalonia, Spain. Since its creation more than 10 years ago it has been working for the freedom and the human rights of women, to eliminate any form of gender discrimination, and to secure equal representation between men and women.

2. All the activities of Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia are inspired by the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In February 2010 it obtained special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

3. The main theme for the 55th session of the CSW focuses on "Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work."

4. Girls and young women are guaranteed access to basic education in Catalonia, Spain, and throughout Spanish territory, as education is compulsory in Spain to age 16. At the university level, the gender distribution among the various teaching specialties is not homogenous, and the majority of the female student body is concentrated in the humanities, health, education and social sciences or law, whereas engineering, mathematics, computer science and technology attract more males. Statistics for the year 2007 illustrate this point by identifying the percentages of female students in the different sectors of instruction: education 78.1%, humanities 60.3%, social sciences 58.8%, health and social services 74.5%.

5. Spain is now making a qualitative leap in the area of ICT (information and communication technologies) and gender through the promotion of training programmes, but women still have few chances to take advantage of new technologies in terms of employment, and they are underrepresented in the most highly skilled ICT jobs.

6. Great numbers of Spanish women are now joining the labour market with better credentials than most men have in terms of studies and qualifications, but many of them still fail to find employment suitable to their level of education, given the lack of equal opportunities between men and women that persists in all societies including ours and that has been worsened by the economic crisis that hit all of Europe.

7. There is also a large segment of the female workforce that has had no access to intermediate or university education and thus faces serious problems in joining the labour market.

8. At the present time, high unemployment rates are a source of concern throughout the country. The crisis has obliged many women to look for work to supplement the family income. Yet they face numerous obstacles in this search: first, the fact that they are women; second, their age; third, their lack of self-confidence and their low self-esteem; and finally, their lack of experience, training, guidance and knowledge of the labour market.

* Issued without formal editing.

9. Consequently, promoting equal access for women to full employment and decent work is a priority issue for Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia. In March 2009 we launched a training and employment project to help women over the age of 45 obtain the training they need to access a labour market that was formerly closed to them.

10. The programme offers tools for independent job searching, it provides up-to-date information on real employment opportunities, it sponsors motivational activities, it helps women develop their personal and occupational skills, it assists in planning a job search through a dynamic support and coaching plan, and it helps women integrate themselves into social and working life.

11. Following a thorough study of the needs of women most at risk of exclusion from the labour market, Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia mounted a programme entitled "Training and Guidance for Women in the Workforce", designed to help women put their inner resources to use, broaden their possibilities, and increase their self-esteem.

12. The programme's objectives are: to help reduce inequalities between women and men in the labour market, to boost the capacities and personal autonomy of women, to empower women and raise their profile, to move forward with integral development in order to make a significant change in women's competitive prospects, opening new horizons for them and giving them the specific tools they need to find a job, according to a concrete and dynamic action plan worked out in advance with trainers for promoting women's employability.

13. The programme has been very successful: of the 30 women who took the 56-hour training course and attended the follow-up meetings and the individual and group evaluations, the great majority landed a stable job within one week to two months after the end of their training. The programme was in fact so successful that approval has been given to repeat it in 2011.

14. This proactive model is a practical example illustrating the fact that policies to promote equal opportunities for women when joining the labour force must pay particular attention to fostering and restoring the values of each woman to whom the training is offered. Policies must include coaching and emotional support to ensure best results upon joining the labour market.

15. There is also a need for efforts to encourage and support female entrepreneurs who decide to strike out on their own. We are convinced that microcredit, which has been so successful in other parts of the world, can be of great assistance in dispelling the spectre of female unemployment.

16. Microcredit has been in use in Spain since 2001, and in 2009 it was given a definitive boost when the Spanish government signed an agreement with the CECA (Confederation of Savings Funds) to make microcredit available throughout the country.

17. This microcredit system could have a greater impact and become a more effective instrument if the size of the credits were increased: they currently range on average between €15,000 and €25,000. These are significant amounts and may be adequate, depending on the circumstances. But given market price levels in Spain's major cities, they are often insufficient for female entrepreneurs who want to start a business, for which they require premises, raw materials and hired workers.

18. In light of the foregoing, we wish to address the following recommendations to all member states:

- Encourage access to training for women who are past the age of compulsory education.
- Make sure that training for women pays due attention to the geographic setting and labour market needs of the region in order to optimize the allocation of resources and address the social and cultural setting in which women live.
- Understand the preferences and needs of the specific female social group to which the training is directed.
- Promote and create mechanisms of participation for individual women and women's groups in taking decisions on the design and operational characteristics of the training received.
- Boost the amount of microcredit earmarked for projects and initiatives of female entrepreneurs.
- Design financing policies and strategies to help women start businesses that make use of ICT, and promote ICT research programmes that will open new prospects for female entrepreneurs in cybernetic instruction and electronic trade and business.